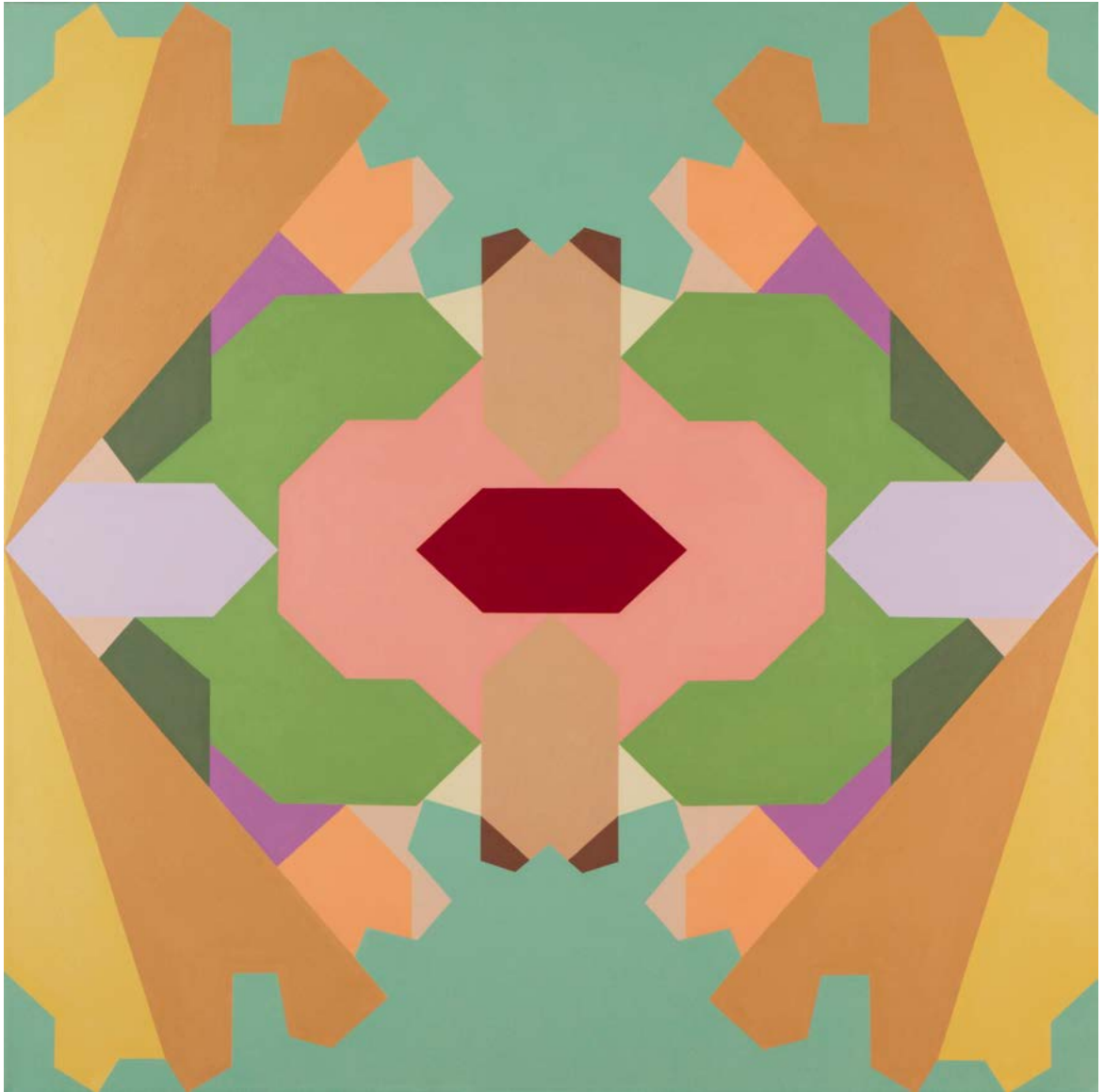


LESLIE WILKES

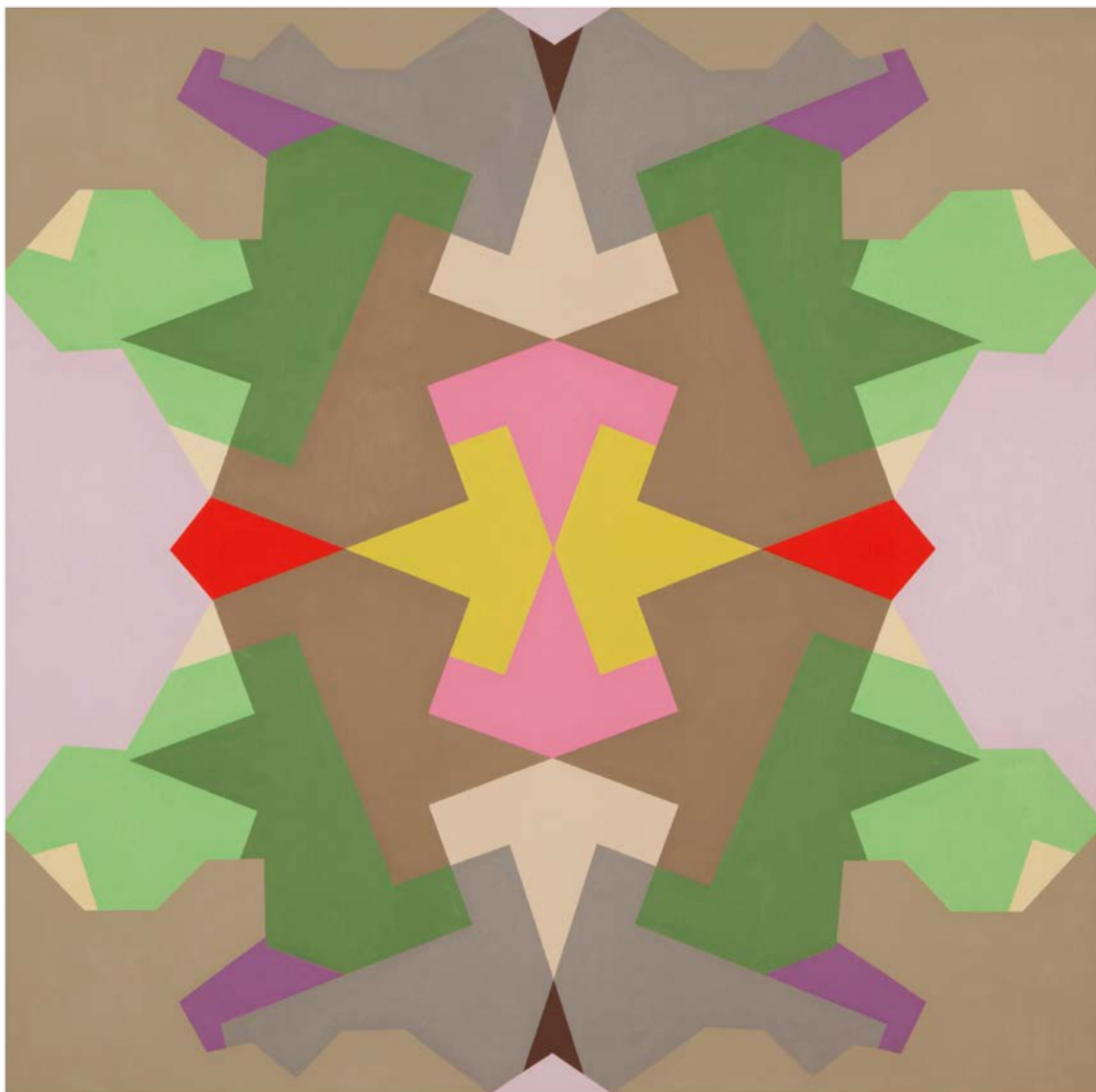
Optic Verve



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

MARCH 29 - MAY 18, 2014

AUSTIN, TEXAS



Untitled, P13.06, oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 2013.

Cover Panel: *Untitled, P14.03*, oil on canvas, 48" x 48", 2014.

ARRIVING AT PAINTING'S DOOR

"The eye should feel caressed and soothed, experience frictions and ruptures, glide and drift...the way it forms both an exploration and a celebration of a fundamental human experience: sight."
—Bridget Riley from *The Eye's Mind*¹

Marsha Tucker the founding director of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York once said something like this: People often don't like contemporary art because it holds up a mirror to their contemporary world and they often don't much like that either. I was transformed by this statement as an undergraduate and have since then advocated for contemporary art whether it is spectacle or ultra drab, testing art's physical and conceptual boundaries, or humoring our expectations. I'm also fascinated with hybrid painting, such as in Jessica Stockholder's work where oil paint, canvas and stretchers are replaced with room size combinations of green manufactured plastic buckets, neon fuzzy textile, and pallets. Why, then, do I always come back to painting? Why am I in love with painting aimed in the rectangular, canvas arena, using brushes and paint?

What comes to mind is John Berger's essay, *Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye* in which he discusses the difference between novels, the theater, movies and painting. A book, he noted, can be opened and closed at will. The story continues where we left off, and if we desire, we can back up or jump ahead. The theater runs (for a time) each night, and the same story plays again and again, just like it did the night before. Movies transport us to places we don't normally go. Painting, on the other hand Berger says, brings us "home."²

I propose several ideas of what *home* is. Home is a place to come back to after

being away for a time. Home is a place we re-group after a harried day, or rest peacefully after completing meaningful tasks. Home is where we may be alone or invite others to join us. It is a place where in being alone we also find our unique selves—our ego and our id, our perfect and imperfect essences; as well as our anxieties, our beliefs, and our habits.

There is a sense in some painting, as in Leslie Wilkes' work, that the painting looks back at us when we encounter it as a viewer. It is an object, a window, and an awaiting experience that brings us back to that place that Berger referred to as *home*—to our self, the viewer. The experience propositions us to consider what is in front of us and how we reconcile that moment within. The scale of her painting is a proportional relationship to our body. The interaction and movement of colors and shape is a dizzying perceptual phenomenon. The symmetry of the design seems to shift, alter, and become still again. Warm, saturated colors rise and come forward; cool, dull colors sink and recede, or do they? The equivocal color shapes in the painting engage us with a kind of kinesthetic



Untitled, 13.P5, oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 2013.

empathy. We may ask ourselves, is this color part coming forward or backward in relation to the flatness of the picture plane? Are we enticed to step back and avoid the oncoming color object, or do we peer in and reach for what appears to be receding? The patterns engage our conscious and unconscious, just as mandalas have been used in different cultures across centuries to both focus the mind and alter it, promoting meditation, hypnosis, or psychedelic experiences. Wilkes describes it as "...a kind of kaleidoscopic Rorschach blot..."³

The interest in the relationship of sound to the physical world (including mystical and spiritual qualities) spans across time: from Pythagoras' *Music of the Spheres* to the influence Theosophist Helena Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) had on visual artists of her time. Vibration, geometry and color, as well as the desire to make the invisible visible, continued with Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater. Their publication *Thought-Forms* (1905) contains illustrations of emotional states, like radiating affection, documenting the specific shape and color, as it would appear in an individual's aura. Sixten Ringbom wrote that Wassily Kandinsky translated his model of Theosophy as "Finer emotion consists of vibration, vibration shapes the work of art, the work vibrates, and the soul of the beholder is set into vibration."⁴ Vibration much like the kinesthetic empathy I mentioned earlier.

Kandinsky also suggested in his *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* that certain tones of yellow sound like, "an ever louder trumpet blast or a fanfare elevated to a high pitch."⁵ The relationship of sound and the visual world includes the phenomena of synesthesia, where a person experiences sound as a color or taste or vice versa.

One may wonder why some visual works of art lend themselves to be heard. Perhaps in Wilkes' work it is the progressive layers of the geometric design as it unfolds and expands. Color, shape and scale may suggest pitch, tone, frequency, and the point of origin. Wilkes writes, "Patterns are fascinating to me because I can make so many variations within them. By isolating shapes, new configurations emerge from the original pattern."⁶ Today Wilkes' work might play the symmetries and shifting units of contemporary composers Philip Glass and Steve Reich.

Wilkes is among the many contemporary artists working today in Abstract Painting. Her work conjures the hard-edge geometric abstraction of Frank Stella, Bridget Riley or Jo Baer. Josef Albers' seminal *Interaction of Color* also comes to mind. All explore variation and seriality in their image making. Wilkes writes:

"The mutations (of each work) may adhere closely to the original or deviate radically, but they are fundamentally all sequels of the original. The shapes are pre-determined, but not the configuration of color, so the final image is always a surprise. The image remains unresolved until the last shape and color are defined."⁷

Wilkes shares an interest with painters whose abstraction is driven by a source or idea. Wilkes' paintings have a kinship with the mischievous, playful, pulsating grids of Joanne Greenbaum (although Greenbaum's idea-like scribbles contrast deeply with Wilkes' characteristic control of form and edge). The strong pattern and color of wall paintings by Sol LeWitt visually compare, but he instructs others to use his specific, written directions to execute his painted geometry. Abstract artists Steve Roden, Thomas Nozkowski and Franz Ackerman use information as a source to direct, influence or guide the shape and composition of abstract images,



Untitled, 10.01, oil on canvas, 72" x 72", 2010.

but each, like Wilkes, engage sources in a highly individual way.

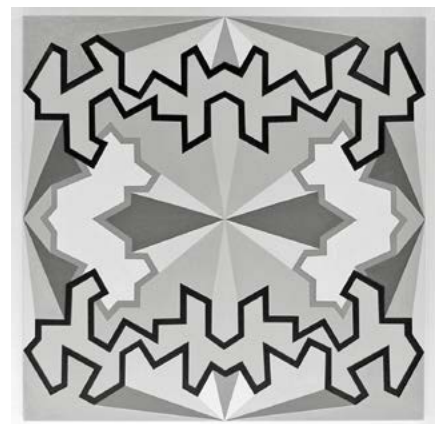
Leslie Wilkes' sources include 1970's graphic design and continue to be from graphic material both early and recent. She draws on her recollection of fashion from the 60's and 70's, a zebra mural her uncle painted, her grandmother's psychedelic shirt of brightly colored paisleys with swirls of black and white, a Peter Max beach towel and the iconic Dylan poster by Milton Glaser.⁸

Her paintings may originate with graphic inspired imagery as well as a system or process of organization, but there is the presence of the artist's hand in Wilkes' work. Beginning with pencil and gouache on paper, she uses ruler and tape to make her repeating patterns. Her painting process lets go of ruler and tape as she continues to manipulate the pattern. She explains: "Brushstrokes are minimal, but not absent. The color and surface are rich and belie their graphic beginnings."⁹

Whether reading graphic patterns or composing kaleidoscopic serial symphonies of color and shape by hand, Wilkes' investigation pulses in her paintings and gouaches. For those viewers willing to step through the door of perception, it may even be possible to come home again.

Essay by Lorraine Tady, Artist and Visual Art faculty at the University of Texas at Dallas.

- (1) Riley, Bridget. *The Eye's Mind: Bridget Riley, Collected Writings 1965-2009*. Edited by Robert Kudiellka. (Thames & Hudson, New York, 2009).
- (2) Berger, John. *Selected Essays*. Edited by Geoff Dyer, pp 474-482. (Pantheon Books, New York, 2001).
- (3) Wilkes, Leslie. Artist Statement, 2013.
- (4) Ringbom, Sixten. *Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers, in The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, edited by Maurice Tauchman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).
- (5) Kandinsky, Wassily. *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, trans. Michael T.H. Sadler (London: Constable Company, 1914).
- (6) Wilkes, Leslie. Artist Statement, 2012.
- (7) Wilkes, Leslie. Artist Statement, 2012.
- (8) Wilkes, Leslie. Artist Statement, 2013.
- (9) Wilkes, Leslie. Email interview with the artist, January, 2014.



Untitled, 11.01, oil on canvas, 72" x 72", 2011.

LESLIE WILKES

EDUCATION

- 1995 School of the Art Institute of Chicago, MFA
- 1989 University of Texas at Austin, BA with Highest Honors
- 1981 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Optic Verve*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
- 2013 *Double Take*, Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2013 *Squared*, McMurtrey Gallery Project Space, Houston, TX
- 2013 *Marfa in Milano*, Spazio Orso 16, Milan, Italy
- 2012 *Prosopagnosia*, Marfa Country Clinic Gallery, Marfa, TX
- 2011 *Face Blind*, Generator Exhibitions, Albuquerque, NM
- 2009 *Sequels*, Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2009 *Leslie Wilkes*, Red Flag Project Space at the College of Santa Fe, NM
- 2008 *Paintings & Gouaches*, Gallery Nord, San Antonio, TX
- 2007 *Gouaches*, HWY 90 Gallery, Marfa, TX
- 2006 *Red White Blue*, Marfa Book Co. Gallery, Marfa, TX
- 2001 *Smoother*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA
- 2001 *With and Without Me*, Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, NY

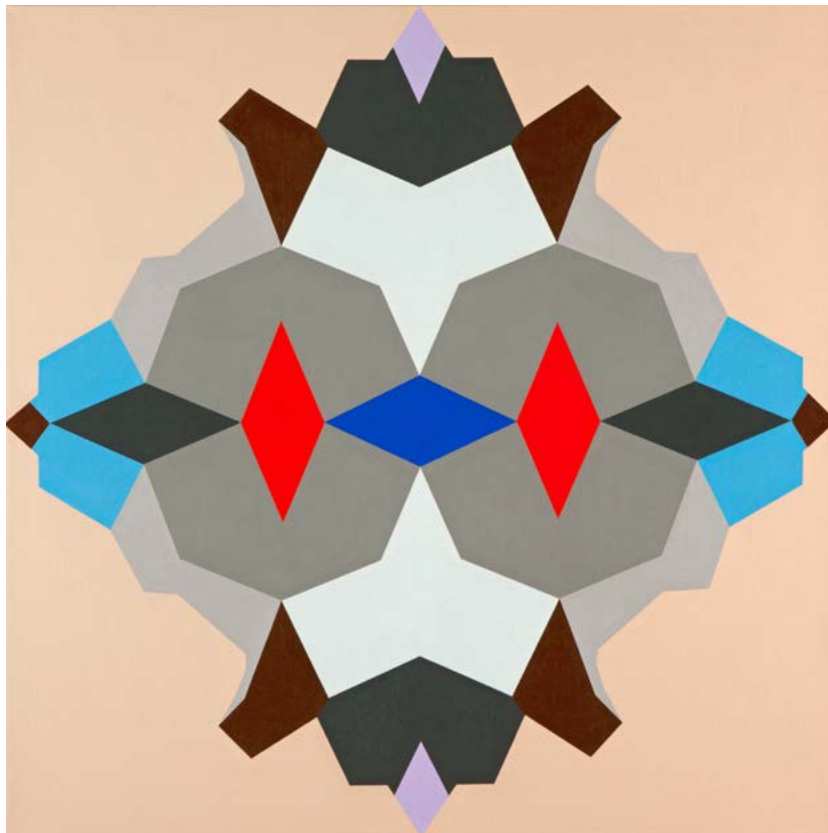
OTHER EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Seven Artists*, McMurtrey Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2012 *Architectonic*, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX
- 2012 *Art from the Plateau*, Nancy Fyfe-Cardozier Gallery, UT Permian Basin, Odessa, TX
- 2011 *12 Abstractions*, Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2011 *XXV Anniversary*, Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2010 *Speed Wilkes*, 124 El Paso, Marfa, TX
- 2009 *Inaugural '09*, Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2008 *Fresquez-Meisner-Wilkes*, Queen's Nails Projects/ Waypoint:Marfa, Marfa, TX
- 2007 *Martha Hughes*, Scenes, Leslie Wilkes, Gouaches, HWY 90 Gallery, Marfa, TX
- 2006 *Patriot Acts*, Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2004 *Contemporary Perspectives*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Rosa, CA
- 2004 *Exquisite Corpse*, California College of the Arts, San Francisco, CA
- 2004 *California College of the Arts Faculty Exhibition*, Oliver Art Center, Oakland, CA
- 2003 *Solid Gold*, Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA

- 2003 *California College of the Arts Faculty Exhibition*, Oliver Art Center, Oakland, CA
- 2002 *post postcard*, Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA
- 2002 *Forty and Up*, 701 Chestnut Street, San Francisco, CA
- add/drop/add faculty exhibition, California College of the Arts, Oakland, CA
- 2002 *Snowglobe*, Gescheidle Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2001 *I am in a Big Show*, Paulette Long and Shepard Pollack Gallery, California College of the Arts, San Francisco, CA
- 2001 *Venus*, Gescheidle Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2001 *Gesture*, Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, NY
- 2000 *Pleasure Seekers*, Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Denver, CO
- 2000 *The Big Picture Show*, Bucheon Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2000 *Circus SoEx*, Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA
- 2000 *New American Talent*, Texas Fine Arts Association, Austin, TX



Untitled, 13.P4, oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 2013.



Untitled, P14.01, oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 2014.

Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 36th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,876 artists in 288 visual art exhibitions, 121 music, dance and theater events, 15 film festivals, 24 literary readings and 513 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, the New York Times, ArtForum and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from

the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 950 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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